THE MISTAKE

By Morgan Robertson

The late Morgan Robertson, the writer of sea tales, never manifested his unusual insight in a more marked degree than when he was writing of submarines. While undersea craft were still an unknown quantity he was able to describe their manner of fighting and their offensive power in a manner surprisingly in accord with the developments of the present war. That is one reason why the story printed here is interesting. But it is worth reading in itself.

WARFARE OVER, ON AND UNDER THE SEA

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British submarines attacking a Zeppelin which is seeking to drop bombs on the fleet patrolling England's coast.

THOUGH the big cruiser's speed gave the semblance of a twenty knot breeze on deck, there was really no wind. The sea lay smooth save where the two bow waves—billows of phosphorescent foam where they began—stretched away to starboard and port like twin tails to a comet and where the water thrown up by the screws swirled and twisted astern in currents of liquid flame.

On each side, between the bow wave and the wake and keeping pace with the ship, was a moving hollow flecked with dots and serpentine lines of light—miniature constellations in an inverted liquid firmament; but there were no stars, and a thick haze hid the Manchurian coast, close at hand, to the east. So, as is usual on such nights, lookouts peered keenly ahead.

Something of the weird beauty of the night got into the restless brain of the young Fourth Lieutenant and made him unusually wakeful. He remained on deck long after being relieved at midnight, smoking and meditating. Drifting aft through the superstructure to the quarterdeck, where he had no business to be, he passed the two lifebuoy lookouts and stepped to the taffrail, where hung the patent log, its twisting line stretching far beyond the swirling currents of the wake to the rotator that spun off the mileage, deep in quiet water.

There was an "Irish pennant"—a clinging ropeyarn—on the log line about five feet abaft the taffrail. It did not interfere with the spinning of the line, but it annoyed him. He could have pulled in the line, removed the yarn and again smacked it off; or, as an officer, he could have delegated the trivial job to one of the lifebuoy men within call, but the unrest of the night was on him and he did neither. He climbed over and down to the small gallery extending around the stern, where he had less business than on the quarterdeck, climbed over the railing and, holding on with his right hand, extended his left upward and outward toward the rope yarn.

At this moment, before he had reached it, something came into his circle of vision that made him lower his eyes. It was a sparkling cluster of points in the water over to port, distinct and brilliant, and speeding toward the ship with amazing velocity, as though caused by bursting bubbles that rose from some huge, swiftly swimming fish. But what fish could make such speed? What but——? The paralyzing thought hardly took form in his brain.

He was startled at a critical moment; his right hand slipped its hold and he fell, plunging headfirst and backward into the sea. He struck his head on something hard when far down and was so nearly stunned by the impact that when he found himself on the surface, paddling weakly, he had not energy to call out.

The ship was a full length away from him, a dim and dwindling blur in the darkness. Its lookouts were looking ahead, and no one was aware that Lieut. Halpin had fallen overboard.

He was young, strong, and a swimmer. The sea was smooth and the coast to the east but two miles away. Floating on his back and resting after his first frantic efforts, he drew comfort from the rising full moon. Until it had reached the meridian it would guide him east. With some difficulty he shed his shoes and outer clothing; then, husbanding his strength, he began what promised to be a four hour swim.

But it ended in an hour, just about the time the moon ceased to be a guide and before the coast was in sight through the haze. A long, dark object appeared ahead of him. At first it looked like an overturned boat, but as he swam closer it resolved itself into a partly submerged cylinder of steel, one end round and blunt, the other an elongated cone. His professional knowledge enabled him to identify it on sight, and the unborn, paralyzing thought that had followed his first glimpse of the speeding points of light now found birth and expression.

"It's a Whitehead torpedo!" he exclaimed.

Then came other thoughts, as he felt of the bump on his head.

"It made the bubbles. I fell right in its way. It was sent at the ship and it missed, but—what sent it? Something out of sight in the haze? How far? I've swam at least a mile and that's as far as these things travel."

Additional speculations as to the improbability of any craft torpedoing a cruiser of the United States did not enter his mind—he was still a little dazed by the shock of the fall and the blow. But, swimming to the blunt nose, he unscrewed the little propeller wheel that brought the firing pin to place; then, knowing that the 200 pounds of explosive was safe from detonation, he mounted the mechanical sea horse, which, with sixty-nine pounds of compressed air expended, was now buoyant enough to bear him waist high out of water.

Familiar with the mechanism of the terrible weapon, he investigated in the darkness and found the starting lever up, automatically locking the engine, and the water tripper, which gave full speed to the air engine within, flat down on the curved steel hull. Reversing both, the latter first, he found that the tandem screws in the stern revolved slowly.

Satisfied that there was still compressed air in the chamber and that the torpedo could carry him shoreward, he waited for the moon overhead again to become a guide. But by the time it had reached a definite westerly position the haze had risen and obliterated it, and he waited longer, until sunrise, when the haze cleared away and showed him the shore not too far off, and, seaward about a quarter of a mile, what seemed to be a buoy—a cask on end, with a slim pole or mast rising from it. But from the top of this casklike object extended a man's head and shoulders, and as it slowly approached, propelled by some hidden motive power, Halpin made out that the man was Japanese, his almond eyes nearly circular with astonishment.

"How you swim?" he asked, as the curious cylinder, which Halpin now saw was of finely machined steel, stopped close by. "What you got?"

"I've got a Whitehead torpedo," said Halpin, cheerfully, splashing the water to maintain his balance. "What have you got?"

"This a submarine boat. I look for torpedo. I fire it last at Russian. It missed, and it is valuable. I am far from my base."

"Russian be hanged," said Halpin. "You fired at the United States cruiser Syracuse, but all you did was to scare me overboard. Don't you know a Russian from a Yankee?"

"You belong to that ship? You fall overboard, you say?"

"Yes, and found this toy. What have you got there—a submarine?"

"Yes—and I say, can you help? I trim by the stern and take the torpedo in the tube?"

"Yes, I'll help, if you'll take me in too. I'm chilled through."

II.

The Jap called down a few words in his own language; then, while a curved forward deck and pointed nose rose out of the sea, two other Japs came up and plunged overboard. These, with Halpin's assistance, backed the torpedo into one of two launching tubes that pierced the steel hull each side and above the pointed nose, and which from their position and the eyelid action of the shutters that closed them gave a facelike appearance to the boat's bow. Then they assisted Halpin himself, numb in the legs from the long exposure, up the curved deck to the conning tower, where the first Jap, an intelligent looking fellow with a Lieutenant's insignia, welcomed him politely and invited him down the hatch ladder.

"First submarine I've been into," said Halpin as he looked around from the foot of the ladder at the maze of pipes, valves and indicators lining the curved steel walls that enclosed him "though I've studied the subject. How do you manage about dry clothes—when you fall out of this thing?"

"I give you a change," said his rescuer, only a slight movement of his beady eyes responding to Halpin's attemps at humor. "I have one undress coat—your service buttons. I got at Annapolis, where I study."

"Well, if you've studied there," said Halpin, "how'd you make such a mistake last night? Don't you know the Syracuse? There's nothing like her in the Russian navy."

"The Retvizan. I look for her. Three funnels, two masts, quarter gallery. How you fall overboard?"

"Yes—a quarter gallery. It's a Cramp feature, but a dozen ships of any nation have quarter galleries. It's where I fell from. If you'd looked close you'd have seen me, and I'm no Russian."

"My eyes very bad," said the commander, pointing to his beady optics. "I break my glasses yesterday."

"Well," rejoined Halpin, "better trust to some other man's eyes then. If you'd torpedoed Uncle Sam's cruiser last night there'd be trouble ahead for Japan. But isn't the Retvizan on the bottom at Port Arthur?"

"No," said the other. "She is repaired and come out. We look for her."

While talking the commander had brought out a complete change of clothing and Halpin was soon dry clad and comfortable. There was no privacy; it was one long, electric lit, arched compartment, in the forward end of which were the torpedo tubes, in the after the engine and motor.

As Halpin dressed the commander mounted to the conning tower, and the rest, including the engineers, busied themselves in hauling out of the tube the rescued torpedo to recharge it with compressed air. Halpin was dressed before this was accomplished and then the men—seven beady eyed Orientals as near alike as brothers—ranged themselves on fixed sitting places along the steel interior.

Two remained forward seated on the twin tanks beside the torpedo tubes; one, evidently a quartermaster, took a position at the diving gear—the wheel that controlled the horizontal rudder—near the conning tower; and the other four, engineers and electricians, squatted aft near the engine and dynamo.

The intricate system of piping, levers and valves lining the steel shell was so arranged that each man could do his work without moving far from his sitting place, thus maintaining the horizontal trim of the boat. And to this end Halpin at a gesture from the quartermaster had seated himself amidships on a chest from which his change of clothes had come.

When the boat, at a bell and a jingle from the commander, had taken motion under the gasolene engine, and the latter had called down to the quartermaster to relieve him, the two merely changed places, the latter taking up the wet clothing to dry out on the deck. Halpin needed his own, for his six feet of length and eighteen inches breadth of shoulder could barely squeeze into the small garments furnished him.

"Where are you bound now?" he asked as the commander sat down and faced him. "Any place where I can get out and join my ship? She's bound for New-Chwang."

"No, you will not join your ship until the war ends. You have learned of the existence of this boat, and Japan's policy is to keep it secret."

"What?" asked Halpin, in amazement. "Will you detain an officer of the United States navy?"

"I could not take your support from under you and leave you to drown, so I rescued you. Is not that enough?"

Halpin looked steadily into the stolid face of the Jap, while his own hardened.

"Yes," he said, slowly. "I suppose, under the circumstances, it is enough. You scared me overboard and then picked me up. Anything further is a matter between those higher up. What's your name? Mine is Richard Halpin, of the United States cruiser Syracuse."

"Sagu Matsumoro, Lieutenant in the Japanese navy, in command of the submarine torpedo boat Hachi."

"All right, Lieut. Matsumoro. Now, tell me, where are you bound?"

"Around the Liaotung Peninsula, where we found our last victim."

"Victim?" inquired Halpin. "What do you mean?"

"The Petropavlovsk."

"What? Do you mean—this boat—wasn't it a floating mine?"

"It was this boat," said the Jap, his beady eyes glistening. "I do not mind telling you, as you cannot divulge. This little boat, unseen, unknown to the world, sank the mighty battleship, and Russia and the world think it was a mine. Mine—" The Jap's face showed emotion. "What mine could hit a craft amidships that was under way?"

"By George," said Halpin, "I've thought of that! So it was you? But why don't you go into Port Arthur and torpedo them all?"

"You forget the mines. We have no chart nor definite information. A submarine is blind under water and in more danger than a surface boat."

"And so you lure them out. Do you think the Retvizan is out?"

"The Retvizan is repaired and has come out. She was reported in this neighborhood, but it was no doubt your ship. We will look around."

"There were others," said Halpin, "that ran on to mines—as was given out. Was that right?"

"The Pobieda did not."

"The Pobieda! What other scalps have you got?"

"The Poltava, the Askold, the Diana, the Boyarin, the Yenesei."

"Heavens! And you'll keep this up, I suppose, until you've cleaned up the Russian navy?"

"More. I will have abolished the armored ship in all navies. What use a battleship that must see what she fights? The submarine is invisible and strikes with the most terrible weapon."

"Can you keep the sea? What's your cruising radius?"

"Fifty miles submerged—400 on the surface. I must come up for air every ten days, and once in four months I must touch a base for food, water—oftener for torpedoes."

"But you must come up to see."

"No, nor to hear. We run on the surface now, until the storage battery is charged. Then we submerge. But I show you my mechanical ear. Look—put this on."

The Jap reached down from the conning tower a flexible tube with ear plugs, such as is worn by telephone girls, and by a gesture to the engineer stopped the engine. In the hush that followed the sound of lapping water above came down through the opened hatch, but when Halpin had arranged the apparatus to his ears this gave way to a roaring sound, swelling and lessening.

"You hear the surf on the beach, two miles away," explained Matsumoro when he had described it. "Water carries further than air. I hear, even in storm, the beat of a steamer's screw five miles."

"What is it?"

"My own invention. I have not named it. A parabolic reflector with telephone diaphragm in the focus. I move it in azimuth by this." He showed Halpin a lever, which was also an index, that swung horizontally beneath a compass. "It indicates the direction of the sound," he added, signalling again to the engineer.

"Good," rejoined Halpin as he removed the ear plugs. "I'm acquiring an immense respect for you folks. But how do you see? By a periscope, I suppose; an improvement, I'll bet!"

"My own invention too," said the Jap, a slight gratification showing in his face. "Better than any periscope. Did you notice the circular deck surrounding the conning tower above?"

"Yes," answered Halpin, looking upward.

"It does not show from within. It is an empty superstructure enclosing in utter darkness the screen of my panorama. The mast is a hollow tube with a lens at the top. At twelve feet depth, with but three feet of tubing above water, provided I maintain an even keel, I get a moving picture on this screen of every object—every wave and ship—within or on the horizon."

"And is it reliable with your bad eyes?"

"Better with my bad eyes. My field of vision is close to me and nearsightedness does not matter. Had I not trusted to the strong moonlight last night I would not have mistaken your ship for the Retvizan."

"What kind of a lens," asked Halpin thoughtfully, "will give you a circular reflection?"

"It is my secret," answered Matsumoro with a smile.

"I beg your pardon," said Halpin. "I forget where I am—and what."

"You will know in time. I will give it to the United States when it has served Japan—also my wireless telegraphy, which transmits through the sea."

"You're a genius!" exclaimed Halpin in amazement.

"I was educated in America. I am grateful."

"And your crew? Are they enlisted men or officers?"

"Neither. They are trained by me, but not enlisted. We are brothers of the Samurai."

"The Samurai?" said Halpin. "The aristocracy of Japan?"

"Partly; but you have nothing like it in America or elsewhere. It is the military class—with traditions of honor far higher than such as can be acquired. They are inherited. One of the Samurai cannot survive failure, humiliation, chagrin."

"That's tough, in this hard, cold world," said Halpin grimly. "You must all die young."

"Not all. I hope to live. I have never yet failed. I built this boa[illegible] contrived most of her features. I presented her to my country and was raised in rank. I have done more damage to the Russians than all of my countrymen combined. No, I have not failed."

"You came near it last night. What would you have done if you had blown the stern off the Syracuse?"

Matsumoro looked gravely at him, then said slowly:

"True, I almost failed. It would have been hara-kiri for all, and it would never be known."

He pointed up at a short, two handed sword hanging in the conning tower. Halpin shuddered.

"That's disembowelling yourself. Forget it, Lieutenant. We have a saying, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' I wouldn't turn myself inside out for a little thing like a cruiser. I'd say, 'Better luck next time,' and try again—for a battleship. What's the modus operandi?"

Matsumoro brightened.

"I receive my instructions," he said with enthusiasm, "only at night by wireless telegraphy from the private cabin of the Admiral, who alone in the fleet knows of this boat's existence. I never rise to the surface if a ship is in sight. I find my victim with the periscope.

"I lie in wait two fathoms down. I head across her path. At the critical moment, when her course will coincide with the course of the torpedo, these men forward apply the compressed air. Poof—whish, a torpedo is out. Poof—whish, the second is out. Then the world hears of another floating mine."

"But suppose your periscope is seen?" said Halpin. "Suppose a plunging, pointed shell comes down and punctures you? You'll drown like a rat in this thing, won't you?"

"It is one chance in a million. Yet, if so, all can escape to the surface but one. We have practised the drill. The tubes are eighteen inches in diameter. A man may crawl in, take a long breath when the breech is closed. The water is admitted, the bow port opened, the compressed air applied and he goes out, like a torpedo."

"And the last man remains because he cannot eject himself?" inquired Halpin.

The Jap bowed gravely.

"It would be myself, the commander," he said, simply.

"Cheerful prospect ahead for you, Lieutenant, with your bad eyesight," said Halpin. "If you don't see straight, you commit suicide. If anybody sees you, you drown or suffocate. I'm not inclined toward either. May I see that periscope?"

"In a short time you shall see—all but the lens. We shall breakfast now."

III.

After breakfast the electrician on [illegible]ased inspection of the battery register, the engineer stopped the engine and connected up the motor, the quartermaster closed the conning tower hatch and ventilator, and then gave a turn to the diving gear wheel, while Matsumoro mounted the steps to where his head just entered the circular opening in the arched roof of the compartment.

It was only when all midship lights were turned off, leaving the conning tower in utter darkness, that Halpin realized that he was beneath the surface of the sea.

"Come up beside me on the steps," called the commander. Halpin joined him. There was just room for him to squeeze his head through the opening beside the Jap's. Above this opening was another, leading into the conning tower proper, and between them was a lateral view of a garretlike apartment that he had not noticed when he descended—the inside of the circular superstructure deck.

"There must be no interference of light," explained Matsumoro. "So the compass and all dials are self-illuminating and radiate very little."

Halpin barely noticed the compass card, faintly glowing with phosphorescence beneath his nose. His attention was immediately taken with the moving panorama pictured on the inside of the circular wall. It was as brilliant as a reflection in a mirror, a complete reproduction of the sea and sky overhead within an angle of eight degrees above and below the horizon. Every shade of the moving seas was there, from the deep black of the nearby hollows to the blue and white of the sun kissed crests.

The sun was out of sight above the angle of vision, but the sky, the horizon, the land to the east and a cloud bank to the west were as clearly defined and as natural to the eye as if looked at from the deck. To starboard, heading toward the land across the bow of the boat, was a white cruiser with two masts, three funnels and a quarter gallery, every detail of gun sponson and deck fitting glistening distinctly in the sunlight.

"It's wonderful!" exclaimed Halpin. "And, by George, if I know my own ship, that's the Syracuse! I wonder if she's looking for me! Can't you put me aboard?"

"No, I cannot catch her; and see, now she is heading south."

The pictured ship slowly turned her stern toward them and as they looked grew smaller.

"She is very fast, is she not?" commented the Jap. "But, you see, orientation and perspective are perfect. I cannot apply a range finder, which is all that is lacking."

"You don't need one. This is enough; it's the greatest thing I ever saw. An ordinary periscope only takes in a few degrees. Where's the—I beg pardon!"

"The lens is out of water. Other parts are over your head, but I trust you will——"

"I won't meddle," said Halpin. "I'm grateful for what I've seen. Your side is going to win out in this fight!"

"More—we will abolish the battleship!"

Halpin descended and sat down in his place; and there he remained, nibbling biscuit three times a day, sleeping during the night hours, occasionally conversing with Matsumoro, watching the beady eyed wooden faced Japs at their work and pondering ceaselessly on the chance of escape from the strange prison for three days and nights.

Then he wakened from a morning doze to find excitement in the air and emotion showing on the faces of the crew. They were all erect at stations and the commander was at the wheel, his head and shoulders hidden in the darkness above the circular aperture. The midship lights were out and hanging down from the conning tower was the tubing of the underwater telephone—evidently used in a hurry and not replaced on its hook.

"What's up, Lieutenant?" asked Halpin. "Found the Admiral?"

Their last talk had been of this contingency.

"Yes, as you slept I found him. The fleet is in the neighborhood—just where I do not know. We are ten miles southeast of Port Arthur and the Retvizan is out. That is the news I received while you slept. Listen at the telephone!"

Halpin put the plugs to his ears. He heard the chug, chug of a steamer's engines and the vibratory pulsing of twin screws, with a muffled background of steady sound that could be nothing but the wash of the bow wave.

"Come up here," said Matsumoro. "I want your eyes and your judgment." Halpin climbed beside him. "It is very thick above—but what do you think?"

A little away on the starboard bow, as reproduced on the screen, was a huge, gray ship heading nearly end on toward the invisible submarine, and dimly outlined against fog almost as gray as herself. To this obscuration was added the thick, black smoke from her funnels, which, driven by a following wind under the peculiar atmospheric condition of low barometer that sometimes accompanies fog, settled down and enveloped her—an onrushing cloud, from which occasionally protruded a mast, a section of bow, with turrets, guns and sponsons, the forward bridge or the after, the three funnels nearly in line, and an occasional glimpse of a big, white bow wave piled up before her.

"What do you think?" inquired Matsumoro. "I see three funnels and two masts with fighting tops; but I cannot see more. Has she a quarter gallery? It is not the Syracuse—your ship. But is it the Retvizan?"

"Don't know," said Halpin, studying the picture. "It's foggy outdoors, isn't it? That's a battleship, surely. See the size of the forward turret. I never saw more than a photograph of the Retvizan, but, if I remember rightly, she has inset extensions to her funnels."

"Soon we shall see. I am looking for the quarter gallery."

"Don't bank too heavily on that feature, Lieutenant," said Halpin. "Your big ship Hatsuse carries one—I saw her at Hongkong. Don't blow up your countrymen!"

"I know," said Matsumoro, a little petulantly, "it is not likely that I mistake my own country's ship."

"I should hope not," answered Halpin, dryly. "Yet you didn't know the Syracuse."

"In the moonlight, no. On my panorama, yes."

The picture on the screen grew larger, the onrushing monster not half a mile away and heading to cross the bow of the submarine, which barely maintained steerageway under the motor. Then, far in the rear, but still more indefinite and obscure, appeared another ship, and soon another, dim blots upon the gray fog of the morning. A fleet was coming in column, but they showed no colors, and each drove before her the thick blanket of black smoke from her funnels.

A momentary lifting of the fog over to port showed other ships, merchant steamers and sailing craft. Then it closed down, thicker than before.

"I do not know," said Matsumoro doubtingly. "Is the whole Russian fleet out from Port Arthur?"

"Looks like it," said Halpin; "if they are Russian. But you can't tell nowadays. Battleships are becoming standardized, and—by George, she's turning!"

The big warship had swung sharply to starboard, and Matsumoro's beady eyes glittered in the faint light from the compass card as he gave the wheel a turn.

"They have sighted our periscope tube," he said, "and by running from the periscope they have declared themselves Russian, for they have no submarines. Ah, now, I see the quarter gallery! It is the Retvizan."

A momentary clearing away of the smoke plainly showed the forward end of a quarter gallery, but before Halpin had taken fuller cognizance of the exposed details the Japanese commander mildly hinted that there was not much elbow room, and he descended. Soon there was an exchange of Japanese commands and answers between the commander and the four men at the torpedo tubes, then a sharp, emphatic word from Matsumoro that a man answered by turning a lever. A whish, a cough and a thud followed, and Halpin knew that a torpedo was out; a man opposite turned another lever, and a second whish and cough and thud announced the departure of a second torpedo.

At a call from above the engineer reversed the machinery, and while the submarine shivered and shook under the strain Matsumoro flopped down from above, gathered his knees under him, and with his face buried in his hands lay face down on the flooring, meaning like a sobbing child. His men surrounded him, and Halpin asked:

"What's the matter?"

Matsumoro did not answer, and Halpin bounded up the ladder. The stately picture of power and majesty moved slowly along the screen, dancing slightly from the vibration of the hull, and while the men below exclaimed in their language and called up to him loudly he took in new details unfolding in the moving picture, one of which was the after funnel, showing for a brief moment through the smoke. And this funnel was a straight cylinder, with nothing of the telescopic inset he had expected to see.

Another detail of the picture was a scintillating line of red along the dark gray of the superstructure, and even beneath the sea Halpin could hear the rattle of the secondary battery and the whistling and splashing of the sand blast of projectiles sent at the periscope.

"Something wrong here," muttered Halpin, looking down on the group beneath. "Torpedoed the wrong ship, I suppose; but she's Russian, no doubt, or she wouldn't fire at us—though perhaps not the Retvizan."

He looked back at the picture, and even as he looked it disintegrated. For one fleeting instant there was a glimpse of that after funnel rising straight upward. This was followed by flame and a great bursting wave from over the side; then the whole detailed exhibit of sea and sky and exploding battleship became a confused and quivering mass of color and light from the strain upon the periscope tube. At the same instant there came through the sea a thundering crash of sound, with a physical impact that pinned Halpin against the rim of the circular opening and threw every man of the crew prone upon the flooring beside the commander.

Then the dancing mass of color and light again took form on the screen, and as those below struggled to their feet and Halpin freed himself from the lateral pressure it became a picture more fully of disintegration than that caused by the vibration of the tube. It was an epitome of pure destruction: a separation of riven steel and a hurtling of fragments, an apparent uplifting in the centre, a settling at the ends, a distribution of curves and a gradual subsidence and diffusion. Men and other small dots sank downward. The inclined deck of the huge gray hulk went deeper into the sea. Above, black and yellow smoke thinned and floated away.

There came another uplifting of parts, a second whirling of fragments and men, with more belching of smoke, and the utter annihilation of the after part of the battleship as the second Whitehead torpedo impacted where sent. Then this shattered end sank into the sea; the bow lifted, exposing the ram and the curving forefoot.

Small dots slipped and slid aft on the steep incline. The forward end of a bilge keel came into view, and, pointing upward at an angle of 50 degrees, with fully a third of its length out of water, the great gray monster, wounded unto death, slowly launched itself downward.

IV.

With the sinking of the battleship the picture on the screen went out in sudden darkness; for the secondary gunfire had not ceased where a gun and gunner stood intact, and one small shot had hit the tube of the periscope. Halpin, dodging a stream of water from the tube, was hurled to the floor by this second shock of concussion, and when he picked himself up saw Matsumoro on the ladder.

Shaken and unnerved by the fall and the scene he had witnessed, he yet would have ascended to assist in stopping the stream, but was forcibly held back by the others. When Matsumoro, paying no attention to the water flooding his boat, came down the ladder, he brought with him the two handed sword that hung in the conning tower.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Halpin, vaguely. "You sank that ship, right enough, but it wasn't the Retvizan. What do you think it was? Aren't you going to stop that water?"

"It does not matter," said Matsumoro, calmly. "I have failed."

"Torpedoed the wrong ship, you mean," said Halpin, hotly. "Is that what you call failure? With all my respect for you, Lieutenant, you're a fool! Are you going to sink the boat and drown us all on that account?"

Without answering him Matsumoro turned on the midship lights and laid the sword on the floor before him. Then, with his wooden faced men around him in a circle, he spoke quietly and dispassionately, without inflection or gesture, in the Japanese language for fully five minutes.

Meanwhile Halpin watched and listened curiously, and the boat, with motor stopped, hung poised at about twenty foot depth, its reserve buoyancy already balanced by the weight of water taken in. Then a man—it was one of the engineers—stepped forward, lifted the sword, bowed low to his commander, and before the horrified Halpin could speak or interfere he had torn open his clothing, plunged the murderous blade into his abdomen and with a spasmodic upward slash, fell writhing to the floor in a death agony.

The others looked on impassively, and one of them picked up the sword, but before he could use it or even kotow to the chief Halpin wrenched it away from him, sending the man reeling to the limits of the [illegible] room with a fist blow in the face.

"You damnable heathen!" he said angrily, snapping the blade across his knee. "Is this the way you settle a mistake? What do you mean—to kill yourself all around? Do you expect me to follow suit?"

"Do not interfere," said Matsumoro steadily. "Do not dare!"

"Do not dare?" yelled Halpin in a frenzy of rage and horror. "Well, I do dare! If another of you attempts this I'll break him in two!"

Avoiding the now quiet body on the floor he advanced and shook his fist in the face of the commander, who cringed slightly at the potency of that fist. It was a big one; Halpin was a big man.

"As I understand this," said Halpin as calmly as he could, "you mean to die according to your infernal custom of hara-kiri. Well, I admit your right to die any time you like except when your death is a nuisance to me. What am I to do here with a lot of dead men?"

"That is a matter with which we are not concerned," said Matsumoro. "Be kind enough not to interfere."

"You put me out of this boat," said Halpin, "and then do what you like. She's sinking now. Get up to the surface and open the hatch. I'll swim. I don't want even a torpedo."

"No. Your being here is not our fault. We have failed, and according to the custom of our class we [illegible]

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